

# Indiana House of Representatives

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## News and Information

*Media Office*

*Democratic Caucus*

*John Schorg, Director*

*Statehouse, Room 157*

*Indianapolis, Indiana 46204*

*1-800-382-9842 or 1-317-232-9621*

*Fax Number: 1-317-232-9792*

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### **STATEHOUSE REPORT FROM REP. TRENT VAN HAAFTEN**

INDIANAPOLIS – In my final two reports, I want to first share with you the ups and downs of legislation and the importance of bipartisanship. Next week, I will give a general wrap up of the session regarding other bills that passed.

Going into this session, I knew that I would spend a lot of time working on legislation addressing Indiana's methamphetamine problem. As the only lawmaker to serve on the state-wide Methamphetamine Abuse Task Force, I was responsible for HB 1685, which contained many legislative recommendations from the Task Force.

In an earlier report, I talked about the experience of being a member of the minority who has a bill hijacked by the majority. I did not succumb to the demands to remove my name from HB 1685, so the provisions of my bill were procedurally removed and placed into a bill authored by a member of the majority. Setting aside the frustration of this political reality, I worked diligently with Rep. Eric Koch (R-Bedford) to move these ideas forward.

The meth bill that survived until the last week of the session was Senate Bill 444, authored by an Indianapolis area legislator. Promoted by the Indiana Retail Council, SB 444 offered a minimalist effort at combating our meth problem. The House initiatives were broader and modeled after an Oklahoma law passed last year that has resulted in an 80 percent reduction in meth labs found in that state.

When SB 444 was presented in the House, it was amended to include the provisions that Rep. Koch and I championed. As a result, when the bill returned to the Senate, the author dissented, which sent the bill to conference committee. I was fortunate to be named a conferee which meant that I, along with three others, would determine what was in the final version of the bill.

I was hopeful that the House version of the bill would be adopted by the conference committee because of Oklahoma's success, along with the fact that approximately 20 other states -- such as Iowa, Kentucky and Washington -- have just passed similar legislation.

However, after two conference committee meetings, it became apparent that the Senate author was inclined to ignore the success elsewhere and stand by the watered-down version requested by the Indiana Retail Council. One of many lessons that I learned this session was soon to happen.

On Tuesday evening of the last week, I decided to stop by the Senator's office after session ended that day. When I arrived, I was quite surprised to find two lobbyists from the retail council meeting with the Senator and a member of the Legislative Services Agency. They were preparing what was to be the following day's proposed conference committee report. I am not sure who was more surprised that I happened upon this meeting. Of course, it was disappointing to see a special interest group commandeering this important piece of legislation.

At our final committee meeting the following day, I also presented a proposed conference committee report, one that included input from more than just one side of the issue. Since a conference committee report requires the signatures of all four conferees, I, along with another conferee, let it be known that our signatures would not be on the conference committee report orchestrated by a special interest group.

My belief was that meth is too big of a problem in our state to only go halfway in addressing the problem. Meth is a

problem that costs Indiana \$100 million a year and we needed meaningful legislation now. Many counties have decided to pass their own local ordinances to address this problem. By Wednesday afternoon, it looked as if those local laws would have to serve as the next step in stopping meth, rather than a uniform state law.

Then, on Wednesday night, bipartisanship entered the fray. Gov. Daniels endorsed my proposals to curtail the illegal use of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine products, along with the remaining broad provisions to protect children at meth labs and address the environmental problems that these toxic labs present. The governor went public with his disapproval of the senator's handling of the conference committee. Surprisingly enough, the senator approached me the following day to discuss my ideas more fully.

By Friday, we had put together a conference committee report that mirrored my proposals as presented at the beginning of the session in HB 1685. Instead of delaying Indiana's effort to combat our meth problem, Indiana had a Meth Bill that makes it a leader and not a follower. The Meth Bill was the last bill presented to both the House and the Senate this session and both chambers passed it unanimously.

It is my hope that, by taking the same approach as so many other states, we can reduce the harm of this poison in our communities.

Personally, I learned a few things along the way. Never give up on a good idea. No idea is ever dead until the session concludes. And, of course, despite what other differences you may have, working in a bipartisan fashion achieves results. That last lesson is especially true when that bipartisanship comes from the governor!

Next week, I will discuss an overview of the legislation that passed. Please remember that even though the 2005 session is complete, I encourage you to stay in touch with me throughout the year if you have a question or concern about state government or any issues we will face in the Indiana General Assembly.

You can contact me by calling the toll-free Statehouse telephone number of 1-800-382-9842, e-mailing me through my Internet Web site at [www.IN.gov/H76](http://www.IN.gov/H76) or writing to me in care of the Indiana House of Representatives, 200 W. Washington St., Indianapolis, IN 46204.

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